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Lawyer Enters Politics, Proves Successful in Bid for Convention Seat

Albert Gallatin Jenkins, the son of the famous Albert Gallatin, was born in Charleston, S.C., in 1830. He was a member of the Green-Adams family, which was one of the oldest in the South.

By CONVENTIONMAN
NEW HICKORY

To graduate from Harvard Law School, or any law school, before the age of 20 was a remarkable feat. But there was nothing average about Albert Gallatin Jenkins. After his graduation in 1850, he decided that after his concentrated period of study, a little travel would broaden his perspective. With this conclusion his father heartily concurred.

This is the only reason why young Jenkins left the country in 1850 and toured South America. Upon the advice and urging of his father, Captain William Jenkins, Albert visited many nations and ports with which his father had traded through the years. Despite his interest in the people whom he met, young Albert definitely concluded that he would not specialize in mercantile or maritime law. He felt a preference for a career in law which would bring him closer to the problems and the people of his home area.

The South American interlude is somewhat a mystery in the life of Albert Gallatin Jenkins. It is uncertain which countries he actually visited, or the nature of his conversations while there. A reporter for the "London Index," in a laudatory article about Jenkins which was published July 14, 1864, commented as follows on his South American trip:

"When almost a boy, fresh from school and the study of his profession of the law, the threatened struggle of a people in South America against the

despotism of their rulers, attracted him from position and fortune at home to dare climate and danger in the aid of their cause, and although the occasion he coveted did not occur, yet the unselfish and enthusiastic espousal of the cause of the weak over the strong was early inguery of the character and career of the man."

A careful reading of the statements by the author of the London Index article might seem to indicate that Jenkins had some deeper purpose or mission he wished to perform in South America. Certainly that did not appear to be the original reason for his visit, nor has thorough research succeeded in pinning down the meaning of the references in the article.

Suffice it to say, the young law school graduate and traveler returned home and decided to take up the practice of law in Charleston, a good southern-minded city which was not too far from his beloved Greenbottom Homestead. Contemporaries of the young barrister were such outstanding legal figures as James M. Laidley, Judge George W. Summers and Judge James H. Brown.

Ardent Democrat

It was not too long before Albert began to think about the building of a bridge from law to the public service. His father and brothers were ardent Democrats and frequently spoke of their party faith at gatherings. Until he began to practice law in Charleston, young Albert simply had not had the opportunity to make himself or his views known in public circles.

Gradually, the ferment of the times brought new public figures to the forefront. The decline and eclipse of the Whig

Party was already in its last stages when Albert got to Charleston. The rising star of the Republican Party, with its young, vigorous leaders and fighting philosophy, presented a bold, new challenge on the national scene. The Democratic Party was forced to look for new blood and new leadership in its efforts to stave off the appeal of the new Republicans. A situation like this was made to order for a brilliant young lawyer like Albert Gallatin Jenkins, and his qualities as a natural-born politician came to the fore.

The year 1854 was fateful in national politics. Many figures were striving for recognition on the national scene. President Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire waited in the wings, hoping to be drafted for a second term; Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois was a leading contender for the Democratic nomination; and former Senator and Secretary of State James Buchanan of Pennsylvania also threw his hat into the Democratic ring. Of these three Democrats, Buchanan seemed to have a slight edge, because he was a northern man with "southern principles who won heavy southern support.

Aside from the Democratic Party, two other powerful political parties put forth their candidates in 1856. This was the first year the new Republican Party had a national candidate, and they nominated John C. Fremont for President. The dying Whig Party teamed up with the Know-Nothing and American Party to back ex-President Millard Fillmore of New York. With all these prominent candidates vying for the White House, no wonder the political situation in 1856 was highly confused.

With his 75-year-old father fondly looking on from the sidelines, Albert Gallatin Jenkins started making hits of his interest in attending the Democratic National Convention. He began to address political gatherings, to batten-hole influential political friends. The young barrister's remarkable personality shone through. He was immediately recognized as an articulate and brilliant spokesman for the Democratic cause, without any of the brash or "know-it-all" characteristics sometimes associated with those of his age. He combined personal charm with an attractive platform manner, and an easy but rigidly logical method of delivery. He fielded questions with ease, and was a tough man to cope with in a debate. He showed the proper respect for his political elders and inspired the enthusiastic support of the younger element in the party.

Small wonder, then, that Jenkin's name was on many Democratic lips in the spring of 1856. At a mass meeting in Barboursville, presided over by Lt. Gov. E. W. McComas, Jenkins was nominated as a candidate for delegate to the Democratic National Convention. In April a district convention of the Democratic Party in Charleston formally named him as a delegate to the national convention.

Young Jenkins was jubilant over his first political victory. It did not worry him in the least (as it certainly might worry Democrats a century later) that the Democrats planned to hold their convention in Cincinnati at a hall called Smith & Nixon's.

(To be Continued)